Beyond Talent: Creating a Successful Career in Music

Music career consultant and author of the acclaimed Beyond Talent: Creating a Successful Career in Music, Angela Myles Beeching offers this for IWCMFers!

The Six Habits for Success in Music

Truth is, there's no handy roadmap for success as a musician, but there ARE habits that will advance your career, and move you toward success. Over the years, I've advised thousands of musicians and have seen the typical stumbling blocks they encounter (and the ones they create for themselves). I've also seen what propels musicians forward and helps them overcome obstacles. Taking the best of what I've observed, here it is distilled for you below. The most resilient and effective musicians operate using these: the best habits for building a successful career in music.

1. CHECK YOUR VISION.

Clarifying your vision for your future is essential: you can’t get somewhere if you don’t know where you’re going. It’s important to have long-range goals for the life you’d lead in the future; it’s best to write out your goals and talk over with a mentor – do this regularly. It’s not just about the career you imagine, it’s the life you want to live and the person you intend to become.

2. THINK LIKE AN ENTREPRENEUR.

Take charge of your life and your career: be a change agent. Entrepreneurial musicians (like the Imanis!) create opportunities for themselves and others. They identify a need and create something of value (a product or service) to satisfy it. So whether it’s flute lessons or French lessons, it’s creating something of value that generates its own audience or demand. Entrepreneurial musicians look for the sweet spot in the distance between their aspirations and opportunities.

3. BE GOAL-ORIENTED.

Music careers are actually built project by project: whether it’s commissioning a new work, launching a concert series, starting a reed-making business, or raising money to buy an instrument, these kinds of projects are the stepping stones to career building. Short-term projects inevitably lead to new ideas, connections, collaborators – and to new projects – all of which brings you closer to achieving your long-term career objective.

4. WORK SMART.

It can be difficult to see a clear path to your long-term goal, but achieving goals really comes down to learning how to manage projects. Essentially, it’s about making choices: how to spend time, focus, and energy. The trick is to think strategically and realistically about what needs to be done, and when. Successful musicians break gigantic projects down into manageable weekly tasks, so that the work becomes doable and the stress is minimized. It’s great to have the satisfaction of crossing tasks off your to-do list at the end of each week, knowing that you’re that much closer to reaching your goal.

5. DEVELOP AN ATTITUDE.

A winning attitude has a huge career impact: people want to work with those who are pleasant, optimistic, and inspiring. Whether you see the glass as half empty or half full is actually your choice. Successful musicians focus on the positive. Be grateful and kind to yourself and to others, because what goes around comes around. Winston Churchill had it right: “We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.”

6. BE RELATIONSHIP-FOCUSED.

Successful musicians build lots of relationships: they know that the profession is incredibly relationship-driven. You need to give as good as you get. It’s about building a community of mutually supportive colleagues, collaborators, fans, and friends. “DIY” (do-it-yourself) should really be read as “DIWWO” (Do it well with others) because it takes a team – if not a village – to build a career. So treat your fellow IWCMFers well and keep in touch afterwards: these are colleagues you won’t want to lose track of!

These habits are a sample of what it actually takes to build a successful music career. It calls for more than the artistry; you also need to do what Elvis referred to as ‘taking care of business.’ Beyond talent – I like to say – it takes the courage to dream, the power to plan, and the will to get things done.

Have a terrific festival and I look forward to meeting you all on August 7!

For more tips, check out Beyond Talent — available at the Juilliard bookstore and on Amazon. And sign up for Angela’s weekly Monday Bytes – the musicians’ blog of career tips and inspiration at BeyondTalentConsulting.com